

Aztec School Days

In ancient Mexico, Aztec schools were very different places from the school you go to today. Schools were part of the temples, where priests worked, worshipped, and taught. Sometime between the ages of 5 and 9, children went to live and study at school. Often they studied with the temple priests until they were married. (Although we know boys went to school, historians are not sure whether Aztec girls were allowed to go to school.)

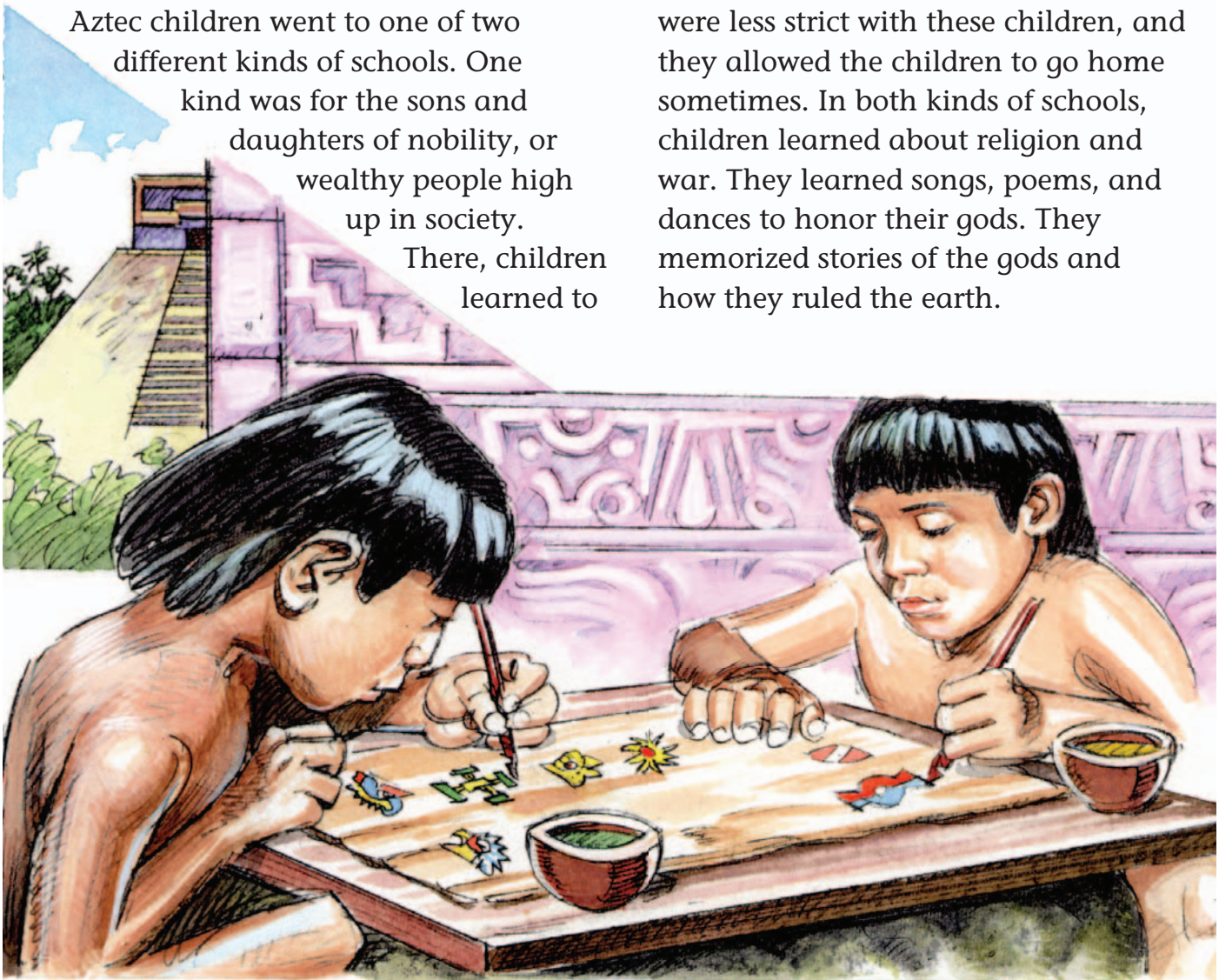
Different Schools for Aztec Kids

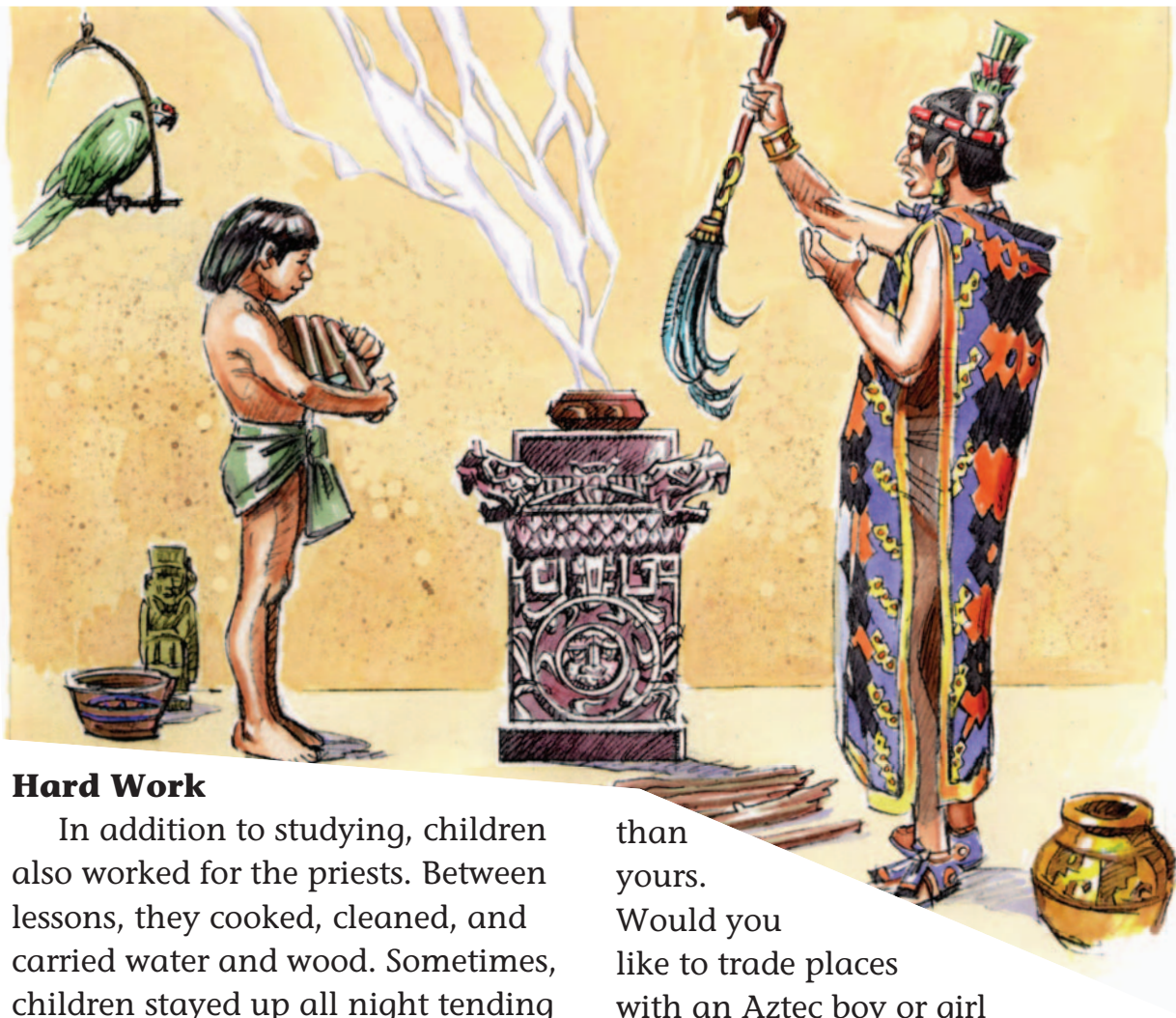
Aztec children went to one of two different kinds of schools. One kind was for the sons and daughters of nobility, or wealthy people high up in society.

There, children learned to

read, write, and do math. They learned to play musical instruments. Some children studied to be priests. They learned the secret language of the priesthood, how to predict eclipses and comets, and how to keep track of the days on the sacred calendar. Other children learned how to work with silver and how to carve wood and stone. The priests were strict with the children at these schools, giving harsh punishments if a child broke a rule.

Children of common people went to a different kind of school. The priests were less strict with these children, and they allowed the children to go home sometimes. In both kinds of schools, children learned about religion and war. They learned songs, poems, and dances to honor their gods. They memorized stories of the gods and how they ruled the earth.





Hard Work

In addition to studying, children also worked for the priests. Between lessons, they cooked, cleaned, and carried water and wood. Sometimes, children stayed up all night tending fires and helping the priests with religious ceremonies.

Aztec children's school days were full of different kinds of hard work

than yours. Would you like to trade places with an Aztec boy or girl and go to their school for a day?

**Adapted from an article by Louise Simone
Illustrated by Ron Bucalo**

Math in Mesoamerica

Count to 10. It's so easy that you don't even need to think about it. But what if you lived in a time when other kinds of numbers were used? How would you count? The ancient Aztec people created their own number system.

The Aztecs used dots to write numbers 1 through 4.

$$1 = \bullet \quad 2 = \bullet\bullet \quad 3 = \bullet\bullet\bullet \quad 4 = \bullet\bullet\bullet\bullet$$

The Aztecs chose pictures, called glyphs, to show numbers larger than 4.

$$5 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \blacksquare \\ \hline \end{array} \quad 10 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \blacksquare \\ \hline \end{array} \quad 15 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \blacksquare \\ \hline \square \\ \hline \end{array} \quad 20 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \square \\ \hline \square \\ \hline \end{array}$$

By combining dots and glyphs, the Aztecs could write any number they needed. Look at these examples:

$$7 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \blacksquare \\ \hline \end{array} \bullet\bullet \quad 13 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \blacksquare \\ \hline \end{array} \bullet\bullet\bullet \quad 22 = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \square \\ \hline \square \\ \hline \end{array} \bullet\bullet$$

To write very high numbers, they drew other symbols, like feathers, and sacks of cocoa beans!